The MILLER'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER

GRACE·FALLOW·NORTON

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO.

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GRACE FALLOW NORTON

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TO

BETTY SCOTT

The hatter said that hats were good —
(This was the madness in his blood.)
The cobbler, sewing in the sun,
Cried, " Without shoes we were undone!"

The butcher said, "But we must eat!
Here is meat! Here is meat!"
The miller called from his tower,
"The world was kneaded out of flour."

Every man to his trade,
Thus indeed the world is made.
So here I cry to the busy throngs,
"We should die without songs!"

THE MILLER'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER

An Unfinished Story

THE
MILLER'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER

1

The high mill hummed. The miller cried:
"The grinding stones and the wheel outside,
Their noise is music, for it means
Money, money, money!"
And he laughed and slapped his jeans.

The high mill hummed. The child beside
The miller chanted: "Ride, ride,
River! Shake your jewelled reins!
O this is music, music —
I wonder what it means."

The miller had tall sons who poured
  The grain into the hoppers.
The miller had two handsome girls,
  Good cooks, prayers, high-steppers.

The miller had one last lone
  Bothersome little daughter
Who was always running on the bank,
  Listening to the water.

"This is music!" cried the sons,
  "Money, money, money!
Bring the grain-bags to the mill,
  Every turn a penny!"

"This is music!" cried the girls,
  "Money, money, money!"
Then they spread the miller's bread
  With yellow butter and honey.

"Lovely music," sang the child
  In the rain beside the water.
"I wonder, O I wonder —"
  The bothersome little daughter.

3

The miller gave his tall sons deeds
And bonds and silver dollars;
He gave his oldest girls gold beads
And wide real-lace collars.

He gave his youngest a dried bean
To punish her for saying,
"What does it mean? What does it mean?"
When she might be cooking or praying.

And yet he thought she'd break his heart,
She was such a ninny.
She could not hear the frank mill blurt,
"Money, money, money!"

To have a child that has no sense,
Ay, it is heart-breaking.
First you feed the little dunce,
Then you give her a shaking.

4

To see your own child run in rags —
Yet proud as wild — and wild as crags —
And wonder-struck and thunder-driven
Like no child that goes to heaven,
And not like you, O not like you —
To see your child when church-bell's due
Flee to the meadow,
Bow to a mullein-stalk,
Kneel to a shadow,
And all alone, talk — talk —
To see her soul like water flow
Over the sluice where it should go
Nor ever turn a good mill-wheel —
To see your own child reel — ay, reel —
And hear her call the moon her mother —
This would be hard on any father.

5

The miller said: "Come, child, now let's be speaking.
If you will sing that song to my liking
I'll dress you up in silk like Ellen your oldest sister,
Pinned at the neck with a garnet cluster."
She thought a frock of pea-green silk would be fanciful and funny,
So she looked up elfishly and murmured, "M-money, m-money!"
"Good girl!" the hearty miller said,
"I'll add some slippers and a new bed."

But from her bed they heard her weep,
The silly said she could not sleep,
She said it was all lumps of gold,
She said that she was bought and sold.

She bounded out of her new bed,
Ran barefoot out of doors.
"There's the flower-bed," Ellen said,
"And you say you like flowers."

"There's the river-bed," cried the other,
Olive. "Try either of them,
But don't you dare find fault with father,
Don't you dare humble him!"

The tall clock went tick-tock, tick-tock.
Ellen and Olive could not look.

"She is so little," Ellen sighed,
"Yesterday's rain has not yet dried."

The tall clock went tick-tock, then struck.
They longed to stop that striking clock.

Olive wrung her hands and wept.
She had not eaten, she had not slept.

"She is so little. O what ever
Made me say that about the river?"

Twelve strokes struck the unkind clock;
Every stroke was a shock.

They heard that she was in the wood.
They baked a cake as they alone could

And frosted it and carried it
Out to find the saucy chit.

They found and threw their arms around
Her, then all three upon the ground

Sat down, wrapped well in hoods and shawls,
Crying like three waterfalls.

Ellen and Olive said, "Dear, dear,
You must come in, that is clear."

And then she got quite out of hand.
"I can't," she cried, "till I understand."

O she had a very stubborn spirit.
She wept, she wailed, she claimed no merit,

Yet clung, as though to a high command,
To "I can't, I can't, till I understand."

The sisters had to leave at seven.
(They had left a roast in the oven.)

7

The miller suffered for his child,
  Though he said she was a sinner,
But the puddings were good, his plate was piled
  Every day for dinner,

And he would not own he missed the lamb,
  Nor that the runaway water
Was always trying to talk to him
  About his runaway daughter.

Yet sometimes he grew fearful too.
  The mill, cruel, powerful,
Roared, *What if there were things she knew?*
  Ay, sometimes he grew fearful.

8

"He is a strong man," wailed the child,
"His mill is strong and high.
He grinds the grain of the hungry world
While we wonder why.

"He says it is a money-mill,
Yet it makes meal and flour,
And they are very wonderful,
We need them every hour.

"He scarcely knows that he makes flour
Because he is not vain,
And O sometimes I wish I were
Back at home again;

"For the farmer and the miller and
The baker, these three —"
The miller called through his hand,
"I make more money than they!"

In the wood she had her house,
An acorn for her dipper,
Made her bed of white birch boughs,
Of sorrel made her supper;

And O she was a shiftless dove,
Ate her breakfast at night,
Hung her wash up Saturday eve
To bleach by white moonlight,

Wove her clothes of thistle-shred
And silky milkweed-tatters —
"For they are very pretty," she said,
"And nothing really matters

"Till I learn to understand
Everything that is;
The miller is mighty in the land,
The high mill is his,

"Makes music for him when he
Goes out, when he comes in,

And yet all things make music for me,
Whose going was a sin."

Thus his erring daughter sings
Of the miller's strength.
The lovely music of all things
She learns to praise at length.

10

When she saw the silver stars
And when she heard the owl,
  Night woke in her soul.

When she leaned by the pasture-bars
Where wind touched her face,
  She kissed his lips in peace.

When she listened in the wood
To crackle, scurry and whir,
  Wildness came to her,

And when she found the dim white road
Pacing through the night,
  She knew the feet of flight.

11

Winter held his cold cup to her mouth.
Like a swallow she flew south
And sang on her way as sweet and loud as
she could
The songs that she had learned in the wood
And all the songs that she had thought to sing
About the meaning of everything.

An old man at the gate of a smoking city
Tossed her a penny out of pity;
A woman in a shady village street
Gave her a piece of bread to eat;
A child who fed her on a wide green lawn
Said she had fed a little white fawn;

A boy she met could only pant and cry,
"I've seen the little white moon go by!"

12

One day she sang in a fountain-square:
"The miller is my father;
He lives where the river sings so clear;
The moon, my far-away mother,
Lets down her shining hair."

A merchant leaned from his balcony,
Saying, "If your father
Is the miller, willingly
I'll overlook your mother.
Child, come home with me."

The little wilful shook her head.
"Listen to my singing.
Here's a song of a golden bed
And the trouble it was bringing.
Buy a song," she said.

But a merchant must not be
So spendthrift; said he'd rather
Give her food and a bed while he
Was waiting for her father
To claim her properly.

"I cannot come," the child replied,
"For I hear what you tell me.
That bed's not high enough to hide
That it would buy and sell me.
Buy a song!" she cried.

13

Those who bought her songs were young,
  Though they might be ninety,
Those who heard her quaint songs sung
  Were old, though not yet twenty.

Those who bought her songs were poor,
  Though now they are rich folk.
I cannot tell you any more.
  There are not many such folk.

14

She sang of songs:

If song is bought and sold
What shall be its price?
O give the singer gold
Or give him a handful of rice

His song shall not be yours
Until he dream your dream,
Until you pay him tears
For tears and flame for flame.

15

The singer has his pride
For a cloak maybe,
To fold over his heart
When the wind blows angrily.

To fold over his heart
That is not proud, that he
Must empty of all beside
Its own humility.

16

I wandered, always wondering,
And very still and shy.
The high clouds wandered thundering
Loud across the sky.

Out of my silent wondering
Was born a song, a cry.
Out of the storm's loud thundering
Silence leaped to the sky.

The mill rang day and night
With a terrible clamor.
Sometimes it seemed to stammer,
To stop — to snap — to bite.

For the miller had gathered stones,
Hard stones for the hopper,
And he had also thought proper —
And better than stones — old bones.

Stones and old bones, alas,
And all because of his darling,
His flitted summer starling,
She brought him to this pass.

For a man defied, bereft,
Must have money, money,
To keep the parlor sunny
That his treasure has left.

He must have money to pit
Against the little queening

Who took away life's meaning
When she went to look for it;

He must have money in heaps
For his daughters' dowers,
For damask and glass and flowers
And moon-white pearls in ropes;

He must have money in hills
For houses and for horses
To run on all the race-courses
And more and more high mills;

He must have money for power —
Ay, he must be respected
Whom joy has rejected.
Now, there's not much money in flour.

"Her kind," the miller said,
"Are burdens and heart-breakers."
So he sold to all the bakers
Bones and stones for bread.

18

Once I bought me shoes of gold
To walk the dewy strand,
But everywhere I went in them
There was desert-land.

O those heavy shoes of gold —
I paid for them, I paid!
For everywhere I stepped or stood
There I was afraid.

When he heard the merchant had filed
Complaint against his own wild child

For insult given in all men's eyes,
He rushed away to apologize.

Then he found her at an inn,
Washing dishes, very thin,

But full of singing as the cricket
That chirps in every autumn thicket.

The miller thundered, "On your knees!"
Then he faltered, "If you please."

For he was almost torn in two
By not knowing just what to do.

Was she his own, this elfin thing,
That knew all alone how to chirp and sing?

She said: "When I have washed the dishes
I get my bread and all my wishes."

Her wishes were such pretty things,
All with airy tunes for wings;

In the alley sun they fluttered,
With that gold her bread was buttered;

She smiled and tossed her little head,
She was so proud to earn her bread.

Bread! The miller gave a moan—
It was as though she had thrown a stone!

He gave a moan, he gave a groan—
She was little bigger than a bone.

20

She said: "I knew, I *knew* you would come
When I had found the meaning
Of many things. The tides drove home,
The moon went soaring, shining,
And I've been hunting, diving deep—
Searching awake and searching asleep—
And once, in darkness, I found dawn:
When day came it was not gone.

"I used to think (and I thought ill)
That in the beginning was the mill.
I thought as only a child can,
A hungry child. O holy hunger and thirst!
Now I know that first,
Before there was a mill
Or a miller to work its will,
There was a hungry man."

21

Hunger is a fearful word.
He shook, he wept, but he would be heard,
The hard, blunt miller. "You're my child:
How came you to be so wild?"
She glowed like moonlight, high, serene.
"Your mother's name was Hannah Jane,"
He muttered. "What's this nonsense I hear?"
She glowed like moonlight, steadfast, clear.
She did not stir. He tried again:
"Come home and I'll give you a long gold chain."
And then he hung his blundering head,
Remembering a lumpy bed.

He thought he might say he was getting old
But the very idea turned him cold,
For he knew he could shake her as well as ever
He used to shake her beside the river—
Except that something held his hand.
Strange—he longed to understand!
Why, when she was no earthly use,
Did he like to have her about the house?

He growled, "I'll not be disobeyed!"
She chuckled and sparkled undismayed
And sang, "What may this hunger be,
That you should hunger after me?"

22

What did you hide in your heart
A thief could rob you of?
What did you hide in your heart?
Could it have been love?

What did you hold in your hands
That broke like a toy?
What did you hold in your hands?
Could it have been joy?

What did you bend to bear,
Calling it a duty?
What did you bend to bear?
Could it have been beauty?

Say, had you need of song?
Tell me of your need.
When you have need of song,
Song shall be yours indeed.

I do not know any more of this story;
When I do it will be my glory.

I only know the miller still
Sets a candle on her sill

And lays a jasmine by her plate,
Murmuring, "Little one, you are late."

He humbly tries to make good flour
To hear her singing every hour;

For when the mill was grinding stones
He says he fairly heard her groans,

And when the mill was grinding bones
He says he surely heard her moans.

He says he sometimes brings her near,
He says he almost sees her clear,

Sometimes he cries, "She is here! She is here!

Give me my daily hunger
For my daily bread.
Then give me another stronger
Hunger, less quickly fed.

Give me to hunger longer,
Unstayed, uncomforted.
Give me only hunger
And it shall be my bread.

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